



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE STRUGGLING HIGH-SCHOOL LIBRARY

MABEL FLETCHER

High-School Library, Decatur, Illinois

Among many faculty members, unfortunately, and among students, in spite of an intelligent, growing school-consciousness, there prevails the mossy idea that the library is the place wherein you look up articles in an encyclopedia, and that the librarian is the spinster who charges your books after school, and keeps track, by some sort of diabolical bookkeeping, of the fines you owe. She has time to read all the good books and magazines. She has no "home room" to contend with, and she is but a spectator at the great youthful drama, her days passing like peaceful clouds over the hills.

Now the high-school library, like any other, is the storehouse of facts, but it is much more. It is an energetic, star-reaching institution of definite moral worth to the community; it is red of blood and unashamed of dreams. The librarian, has, indeed, a knowledge of bookkeeping by double entry, scorned by Paragot, but she has—or should have—what is worth far more—understanding. And it is this understanding which, in a little growing library, hampered, perhaps, here and there over the country by lack of space, funds, and even appreciation, must carry on with a Midas touch a work so largely composed of routine drudgery.

Every high-school library—and I speak now of libraries that are in some measure organized, and in charge of a librarian who gives more time to library work than to teaching—should mean to students and teachers not only a cleanly workshop where coveted facts may be seized upon, but also a restful haven, favorable to good, clear thinking, and, above all, a place where inspiration comes unsought.

The obstacles to such a condition are many. In the first place, the librarian has, of necessity, long hours. She begins work about eight o'clock, and has to evict tenants to get away by five. She has, in all probability, no vacant hour, and her forty-five-minute

period for luncheon is often cut short by seekers for fact. She has classes, perhaps, in some subject or subjects, necessitating the preparation of lessons, and often the marking of many themes, and many conferences after school, plus the use, in classrooms, of much vitality and personality. With such handicaps, plus the large amount of routine clerical work she must perform, if there is no assistant—and even if there is—the average librarian cannot be the inspirational force she should be in “the realms of gold.” Ideas that are most dynamic are born, nine times out of ten, of moments of leisure, of the winging of the mind to heights unguessed in the hurly-burly of I-must-do-this-and-this-and-this in an hour. The words that have changed the trend of lives are spoken usually in moments when the grim machinery of making a living is forgotten, and the little quiet pools of thought or feeling, or the cataract of inspiration somehow pass from the older, poised heart to that of eager youth. So, harried by all the things that be, the librarian, if her service is of the finest, must maintain an air of tranquillity through charging rushes, time-eating teachers’ meetings, and all school exigencies. She must try to serve just as effectively and spontaneously as if she had the period of rest accorded to the other teachers, and she must learn to reach that point, far beyond fatigue, where consciousness takes an extra spurt and works anew.

Perhaps even more than the long hours unbroken by relaxation, the exigencies of routine work handicap the librarian in the small high-school library. To label books, “read” shelves, mend books, and prepare new books for the shelves at the same time one hunts for Jane the red book which Susie had last week, and for James a list of all the trees of literary and historic fame, not to mention the thousand and one questions asked by Mary and Jane’s school-mates, requires some ingenuity and dispatch. Skilful indeed is the librarian who can combine the two, especially when she is besieged many times an hour for anything from “pen points” to paste to paste on Susan’s shoe sole.

Even in a faculty where there is excellent co-operation, there still will be many teachers who, without examining material on the subjects they assign, or, without knowing if there is any material, will send from forty to one hundred students a day to work in the

library. The librarian here has but one course: she must let go by the board accessioning and cataloguing, and, working with several students, find the references. These students she can, in some instances, ask to help others working on the same problem. If the rush is too great, no actual teaching of the ways of tracing elusive material can be taught; the references desperately gleaned in the first search can be given to the students, and they must organize their material as best they can. Remarkable indeed is that school in which the instructors are broad enough to recognize the value of making definite assignments in library work, even unto pages.

The high-school library is the recipient of requests that are not likely to be made in the average public library. Teachers ask that books relating to their subject be given a more prominent place—moved, perhaps, from the lowest shelf to the highest; or a pedagogue pleads, in the face of a shelf-list and catalogue, for a complete list, by author and title, of all the books in the library—"it would be such a help to the busy teacher; it takes too much time to use a catalogue." Wherever possible, even requests rather unreasonable should be granted, though it involve the shifting of hundreds of books and spending hours out of school time, for anything that helps to create a bond of close sympathy between library and classroom is worth while.

Far more difficult than helping a score or so of students every period is the problem of the elimination of students. Those most experienced in high-school libraries—and they are not impractical souls—say that children should be allowed to go to the library any vacant period during the day and browse unquestioned in any of the books. If less latitude is allowed, to decide when a shiftless student shall be sent back to his study room (especially if some teacher is saving his soul), is a problem which looms larger than even those in charge of session rooms realize. Tommy must get his geometry, yet Tommy, whose home library consists of *Tales of the Galveston Flood* and *The Fireside Visitor*, certainly should see *The Youth's Companion* and *St. Nicholas*. If Tommy has a very troublesome disposition, also an assured place in the well-meaning heart of the aforesaid soul-saver, the librarian is likely to run amuck. On the other hand, the librarian is likely to regard as

daily-visiting, exemplary students those whom canny teachers openly proclaim pirates, outlaws, and desperadoes, making sinister designs under an apparent yearning for culture from the printed page. Only a sense of humor added to the usual common-sense, and the dictates of a warm heart, can sail any guardian of books over these troublous seas. A paper might be written on this subject.

The problem of book selections looms large in a school library. In some cases, as school surveys have revealed, the librarian has not known what books were to be placed upon the shelves until the volumes were brought to their keeper. The librarian should, of course, not only know, but help to decide, what shall be ordered; but the lists of books, if the institution is to be most effective, should come in by departments. If the teaching staff is weak in places, if certain departments are content with the textbook question-and-answer method, the problem then is, not only to get the head to turn in lists of books invaluable in his work, but also tactfully to arouse in him an interest and appreciation of what is already in the library. On the other hand, a department alive and kicking with ideas, a department including, perhaps, several souls not contented with a Bachelor's degree, will demand too large a share of the meager book fund. Then, too, reference books used widely and enthusiastically by one teacher and his students will be condemned by the next (usually young), and the librarian, as best she may, has to guard against the purchase of many copies of books which will not be as useful in the sixth year of their school life as in their first.

How can the library in its struggling days be made a small social center for the school? The upper classmen will, on the whole, use it readily enough for various purposes. The dragoness who has to separate fond pairs of Emmelines and Geoffreys who come down ostensibly to read the *Lookout*, often has dour thoughts on the subject. The fact remains, however, that in the average school the library is not a vibrant personality. It is not always easy for the librarian to suggest to the English teachers that she be given, once at least, every Freshman class, and that the class meet for that time informally, if possible, in the library. High-school instructors sometimes fail to realize what a catacomb a big, new

building seems to beginning students, and if, in the first week or two, the pupils not only learn where the books are, but how to use them, and if they feel that the librarian is their friend, personally interested in their likes and dislikes of folk of the page, much is accomplished. Where shall one find time for this?

The biggest problem of all to the school librarian who has no workroom, rest time, or regular assistant, is the problem of cataloguing. In a public library the books are accessioned in the librarian's room, and catalogued in the holy quiet of the cataloguing room. The public may wail, but books are not given out until the niceness of bookkeeping is finished. In a high-school library the books too often must lie on the reading-tables, to be swooped down upon by students and teachers. Students may be denied—but the faculty? “And another ant went in and took another grain of wheat, and another ant went in and took another grain of wheat”—till by nightfall, the librarian, tearfully contemplating her depleted granary, is tempted to use a repressed piratical vocabulary.

If the books remain, the problem is still complicated. To catalogue with nicety in the intervals between the rush of classes, while you see that from twenty to eighty students study; to keep books and periodicals put away between hours; to assort passing cards; to help students with reference work—one needs to be a sort of Gargantuan centipede. After school comes the charging rush, which sometimes does not fully abate till half-past four or five o'clock. By the time the stray books are put away and the circulation counted, the average librarian is not in trim to catalogue even *Tom Sawyer*.

In the days to be, our high-school libraries will be in charge of men and women who have the finest education, both usual and technical, plus warm hearts, richly vibrant to the youthful flow of life in the most human of institutions. They will equal—or surpass—our best supervisors of today. In the meantime, their way is being paved by souls no less earnest, but handicapped in almost every case by lack of time, rest, and model libraries to visit. Yet today a high-school librarianship offers the richest possibilities in high-school work, save that of principalship. Lucky indeed is the pioneer who is called thereto.